

Section 15 - West Colorado River Basin Water-Related Recreation

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Section 15

West Colorado River Basin - Utah State Water Plan

Water-Related Recreation

15.1 Introduction

This section describes the water-related recreational aspects, facilities and resources found in the West Colorado River Basin. Data from the Utah State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) process are included. This process provided information for the preparation of a priority list of key water-related recreational and environmental issues to be addressed in the future. Information includes consumer or participant's expressions of outdoor recreation needs/demands, issues and alternative solutions.

The West Colorado River Basin contains world class desert and mountain recreation opportunities, some of which are enhanced by reservoirs, streams and wetlands.

15.2 Setting ⁴¹

The reservoirs, clear streams, alpine scenery, and world-class red rock plateaus and canyon areas are prime attractions. The major public land



Water skiing on Lake Powell

managers are the Bureau of Land Management, U. S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Utah State Parks and Recreation, and the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration. These five agencies control about 92 percent of the basin area and most of the water-related recreational facilities. This gives them responsibility as well as control over much of the recreation in the basin. National parks in the basin include Capitol Reef and portions of Bryce Canyon and Canyonlands. The National Park Service also operates and maintains Glen Canyon National Monument (Lake Powell). The BLM will administer the new Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. A three-year monument management planning process was recently completed.

The Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration has the responsibility for over 600,000 acres of school trust lands in the basin. Most of these lands are in scattered sections and are used primarily for livestock grazing and wildlife habitat. Recently the state traded its lands located in national parks and monuments for blocks of land potentially more valuable to the school children of Utah. There is the potential for recreational development on these new state lands.

The Utah Division of Parks and Recreation manages eight state parks: Huntington Lake, Goblin Valley, Green River, and Millsite in Emery County; Scofield in Carbon County; Anasazi Indian Village and Escalante in Garfield County; and Kodachrome Basin in Kane County.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) administers the Desert Lake Waterfowl Management Area in Carbon County and located on the Pacific Flyway. This area is fed by springs supplying about 15,000 acre-feet of water annually. The DWR also administers the Parker Mountain Wildlife Area in western Wayne County, as well as fish hatcheries near Bicknell and Loa.

World-class water-related activities in the basin include boating and fishing on Lake Powell; rafting Cataract Canyon on the Colorado River; and canoeing Labyrinth, Stillwater, and Grey canyons on the Green River. The area has many parks, picnic areas and campgrounds, along with undeveloped

areas where water-related outdoor activities can be enjoyed. Swimming pools and golf courses are located in some of the communities. Most of the perennial streams have fisheries, while the reservoirs and lakes provide fishing and flat-water activities.

Outdoor recreation and tourism are becoming major economic activities in Utah and in the West Colorado River Basin area. They impact lodging, transportation, food and retail sales, bringing much needed income into this rural area. Many jobs are related to tourism in the West Colorado River Basin, according to a recent outdoor recreation household survey. Projects have been assisted through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program administered by the National Park Service.

15.3 Organizations and Regulations

Management of recreational facilities and activities is usually by local, state or federal government agencies. Many of these facilities or activities are water-related.

15.3.1 Local

The basin is covered by three multi-county planning districts (MCDs): Central (MCD 4), Southwest (MCD 5) and Southeast (MCD 6). Each of the MCDs collects data to prepare brochures and guide material to attract and assist visitors to the area. These organizations are formed and staffed under the direction of the several county commissions. MCDs are also called “area associations of government” (AOGs). They often provide technical services, clearing houses for grant programs, and other advocacy roles for local government.

Other local organizations involved in promoting recreational activities include county and city/town governments and, to some degree, state and regional tourism organizations.

15.3.2 State¹⁴

The Division of Parks and Recreation has responsibility for conserving Utah’s rich natural resources heritage while making recreational opportunities available to all users. By statute, the

division is the “recreation authority” for the state (see *Title 63-11-17.1, Utah Code Annotated*, as amended). Its mission is to “enhance the quality of life through parks, people and programs.” Within this context, the division manages eight state parks in the West Colorado River Basin. They also coordinate four grant funding programs, manage the OHV program, oversee the boating and trails programs, and prepare the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*.

The division operates under general guidelines of its 1996 system plan: *Frontiers 2000: A System Plan to Guide Utah State Parks and Recreation into the 21st Century* (pp.39). Statewide, 15 major issues have been identified by planning participants. These include boating, participating in the state water planning process, park planning, public safety on Utah’s waters, establishing carrying capacities on lakes and reservoirs, boating education, personal water craft training and certification, personal training, and enforcing the state boating laws.

15.3.3 Federal

Federal agencies with responsibilities to provide and conserve recreational opportunities include the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and National Park Service. Each operates under regulations unique to that agency.

15.4 Outdoor Recreational Facilities and Use

All levels of government and the private sector provide a broad spectrum of recreational opportunities, facilities, and uses. Some of the most used recreational facilities have water features.

15.4.1 City and County Recreational Facilities

City and county recreational facilities range from golf courses and ball diamonds to picnic areas, all using water for large grass areas or minor amounts for culinary needs. Three golf courses are located in the West Colorado River Basin. They are the Carbon Country Club in Helper, Green River State Park in Green River, and Millsite in Ferron. Nearly every town within the basin has large, grassy city center park.

Swimming pools are also large users of water. Price, Orangeville, Huntington, Bicknell, Green River and Escalante have city or high school swimming pools which are open for public recreation.

15.4.2 State Parks

All of the basin’s state parks have major water-related recreational facilities, except Goblin Valley, Anasazi Indian Village and Kodachrome state parks. All of the parks are popular and visitation has increased over the years. Visitation for each of the parks is listed in Table 15-1 along with the water-related facilities.



Escalante State Park

15.4.3 Federal Recreation Areas

Capitol Reef National Park, Canyonlands National Park (Maze District) and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area are the major developed federal facilities. The new Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is being developed into another outstanding recreation area. Table 15-2 shows information on the major national recreation areas and their water-related facilities.

Capitol Reef National Park - Capitol Reef National Park splashes color for 75 miles from its northern to southern boundaries. A geologic uplift of rainbow-hued sandstone; most of Capitol Reef is an inviting wilderness of spires, formations and cliffs. In the midst of Capitol Reef’s red rocks and ancient petroglyph panels are large orchards where

Table 15-1 State Parks Visitation and Facilities			
Park	Visitation (1000)	Water Area (acres)	Water-related Recreational Opportunities
Anasazi Indian Village	99	0	None
Escalante	77	100	Flatwater fishing, boating and swimming
Goblin Valley	71	0	Camping
Green River	138	Staging area for river recreation.	River boat launching, golf course, and camping
Huntington Lake	63	250	Flatwater fishing, boating and swimming
Kodachrome	64	0	Camping
Millsite	47	530	Flatwater fishing, boating and swimming
Scofield	104	2,800	Flatwater fishing and boating

Table 15-2 Federal Parks, Monuments and Recreation Areas			
Name	1998 Visitation (1000)	Type	Water-related Recreational Opportunities
Bryce Canyon National Park	1,649	Geologic	Camping
Canyonlands National Park (Maze District) (Horseshoe Canyon)	432	Geologic Pre-history	Rafting/canoeing Hiking and camping
Capitol Reef National Park		Geologic Historic	Orchards, hiking and camping
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area	2,400	Recreation	Boating, fishing, swimming, rafting, hiking and camping
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument - BLM	>120	Geologic Pre-history Biological	Hiking and camping

fruit may be picked in season, and the remnants of Fruita, an early pioneer settlement. The visitor center is open year-round. Several fairly easy hiking trails and the 25-mile Scenic Drive lead from the vicinity of the visitor center. Cathedral Valley and other back country areas may be reached via high-clearance dirt roads.

Canyonlands National Park - Views thousands of feet down to the Green and Colorado rivers, or thousands of feet up to red rock pinnacles, cliffs and spires create the incredible beauty of Utah's largest national park. The two rivers have sliced Canyonlands National Park into three districts, each named according to its distinctive landscape: Island in the Sky, Needles and The Maze. This rugged national park is world-renowned for its four-wheel driving, mountain biking, whitewater rafting and hiking.

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area - Lake Powell, the second largest reservoir in North America, is 186 miles long and has 1,960 miles of shoreline. Hundreds of side canyons, inlets and coves sheltering Indian ruins and natural wonders make Lake Powell a paradise for houseboating and photography. Relatively warm spring, summer and fall water temperatures make Lake Powell ideal for swimming (see Table 15-3).

Lake Powell is also known for its bass fishing. Five major marinas are located along its shores. Bullfrog Marina, 70 miles south of Hanksville, and Wahweap Marina, 7 miles north of Page, Arizona, have lodges for overnight accommodations. Campgrounds and housekeeping trailers are available at Hite, Halls Crossing and Bullfrog marinas. The John Atlantic Burr Ferry operates between Bullfrog Marina and Halls Crossing.

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument - In September 1996, President Clinton designated this new national monument. It is unique in that it is the first monument to be administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The monument is a geologic sampler, with a huge variety of formations and features, and world class paleontological sites. Through 2001, the BLM, Department of the Interior, White House Council on Environmental Quality, and Utah state and local

Table 15-3
Lake Powell Air and Water Temperature

Month	Air Temp. (°F)		Water Temp. (°F)
	High	Low	
January	45	24	47
February	53	31	46
March	61	36	52
April	72	46	54
May	82	53	62
June	90	62	70
July	97	71	76
August	64	69	80
September	88	60	76
October	77	46	69
November	59	36	62
December	45	25	53

officials are working together to design the monument's management plan and determine the best ways to enjoy the monument's resources. The EIS was completed recently.

National Forests - Many campgrounds and picnic areas are located in the Dixie, Fish Lake and Manti-LaSal national forests. All of these contain mountain lakes, reservoirs and streams. Major water-related opportunities within the national forests include: 1) Fishing and boating on Joes Valley, Electric Lake, Huntington, Cleveland, and Johnson Valley reservoirs; 2) fishing and boating on Fish Lake; and 3) fishing on Huntington Creek and the upper Fremont River system.

15.5 Recreation Activity Problems and Needs ¹⁴

The Division of State Parks and Recreation is in the process of conducting a series of public opinion surveys associated with state parks and the Utah SCORP (Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor

Recreation Plan). The 1992 survey helped determine the recreational problems and needs in the West Colorado River Basin. Opinions expressed in this survey are listed below:

- Enhance winter outdoor recreation opportunities: access, facilities, programs.
- Need for Outdoor Recreation ethics--among OHVers, bikers, and littering campers and fishermen.
- Develop stable funding sources for acquiring lands and developing outdoor recreation and tourism facilities.
- Provide more water-based recreation opportunities: access to lakes, reservoirs, streams.
- Provide information facilities for travelers and tourists--get them off the freeways and into the area.
- Provide improved quality and accessible hunting and fishing opportunities: areas being closed off by private development and federal regulations.
- Provide recreation planning assistance to local government and businesses: grants, data base, programs.
- Complete reasonable development of existing parks: renovate where run down; provide at least a basic level for visitor services in local, state and federal park and recreation areas. (*Utah SCORP, 1992, p. 93*)

Reservoir user surveys were conducted by the Division of Parks and Recreation in 1996-1997. Each reservoir park site has different characteristics, but there are some common findings and concerns by reservoir park users:

- Respondent parties expend between \$90 to \$230 per visit on food, lodging, gas, recreation equipment and equipment rentals--usually in parties of two adults and more than two children.
- Location, facilities and affordability are primary attractions to park users.

- Major needs include maintenance of facilities (clean and green), trails, rentals (jet skis or boats), shade and water access--including beaches.
- Depending on the park, and its level of development--the provision and maintenance of beaches and rest rooms ranked very high.
- The most popular activities were camping, boating, waterskiing. This depends upon the quality and character of the resource in question.

15.6 Needed Recreation Opportunities

A 1995 and 1991 statewide survey revealed public attitudes and desires regarding state parks and outdoor recreation in general:

- Needs for the counties included developed camping opportunities; improved fishing (access, quality habitat); improved hunting (access, quality of big game and upland game); golf courses (varied between counties); primitive camping (only basic, if any development); picnicking facilities; trails; OHV staging areas and trails; mountain bike trails; equestrian facilities (corral, hitching, loading, watering staging areas); backways and byways (less developed roads for sightseeing, and paved roads with good signs, beautiful vistas and access to quality recreation areas).

Some problems that need to be reviewed include:

- Improve and update recreation facility and support facility infrastructure to encourage revenue generation from tourism.
- Improve the comprehensive planning process for the allocation of natural resources; i.e., look at all uses, conflicts, and opportunities for any water, highway or other resources development.
- Plan and construct a comprehensive localized and connecting trail system

linking key resource areas such as reservoirs; lakes; forests; national, state, and community parks; Great Western Trail; and American Discovery Trail.

- Improve government agency cooperation and coordination to reduce costly redundancies and resolve federal wilderness issues.

In 1991, as part of the *Utah SCORP* process, recreation-providing agencies were asked their major concerns or issues. These include:

- Need for interagency coordination.
- Assuring environmental quality.
- Public and private cooperation--partnerships, coordination.
- Need for recreation development and infrastructure improvement.
- Deteriorating facilities and systems.
- Overcrowding of existing recreation facilities and resources.
- Recreation water allocations--leaving enough for recreation and fisheries.
- Environmental education--reducing conflicts, damage and management costs.

More than 23 problems were identified by government agencies. These range from funding to wetland and cultural site protection, application of computer technology, greenways and trail development needs. It was understandably different from problems identified by resource users who had a few common concerns for funding, new facilities, wilderness, government coordination and access problems. Many of these problems can be realized or obviated by good design, adequate capitalization, public participation in the planning process, and coordination and good management of water resources development or river corridor protection.

15.7 Issues and Recommendations

Two major issues are outdoor ethics and comprehensive planning.

15.7.1 Outdoor Ethics

Issue - Many conflicts are exacerbated by unethical behavior in recreational settings.

Discussion - As the use of flat-water facilities increase, boating and water skiing accidents are becoming more commonplace. There often appears to be no concern by boaters for each other's safety or for respecting other's recreation experience, particularly when water-skiing is involved.

Some areas are so popular, especially on holiday weekends, facilities are over-crowded to the point security personnel are required to maintain a semblance of order. Problems arise when multiple ownership exists and coordination is lacking. Waste disposal facilities are especially over-loaded to the point it is dangerous to people's health and welfare.

Programs such as TREAD LIGHTLY, CAPTAIN SAFE'TE (boating safety), hunter education and off-highway vehicle training are helping make everyone aware of the problems. Education and enforcement programs need to be continued and even increased in the future.

Recommendation - The Division of Parks and Recreation should organize groups with a cross-section of recreators and managers to obtain ideas and support for recreational safety and to determine ways to reduce conflict.

15.7.2 Comprehensive Planning

Issue - Efficient allocation of resources can best be achieved through comprehensive planning.

Discussion - The Division of Parks and Recreation is in the process of preparing comprehensive management plans for all the areas it manages in the West Colorado River Basin. The objective is to make all state parks more attractive and better able to meet the needs of the recreating public.

Recommendation - The Division of Parks and Recreation should continue to prepare and update management plans to achieve and balance the use of water resources for recreation. ●